



# Mental Health

## *Advisory Council*

August 6, 2018

Children, Family, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee  
Montana Legislature  
Helena, MT

Dear Interim Committee Members,

On behalf of the Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council, please join us in advocating to DPHHS for the return of a knowledgeable Office of Public Assistance eligibility worker in Dillon once each week. The Beaverhead County LAC, in conjunction with the Beaverhead County Commissioners, will provide **at no charge to the state or DPHHS**, office space, phone, and internet access for this requested eligibility worker. This proposed partnership results in area residents having access to a knowledgeable eligibility professional and eliminates many overhead expenses involved in having a state office in Dillon.

DPHHS closed the Beaverhead OPA office in January 2018 due to statewide budget cuts. The office closure left a huge gap in services, resources, and referrals for many of our most vulnerable citizens, especially the aged, disabled, and those with mental health challenges. Since January 2018, our community has worked to fill the gaps left by the closure of the OPA office, the Western Montana Mental Health Center/Clinic and Day Treatment, the Southwest Montana Chemical Dependency Center, and the Dillon Job Service.

While the Human and Community Services Division offered an on-line application and telephone assistance in a "help line" to offset the OPA office closure, those services don't work well for many, are often fraught with delays, and irrelevant or inaccessible to those who aren't technologically savvy. As noted many of these folks are disabled, aged, or have mental health diagnoses and/or behavioral health challenges.

This unique partnership offer addresses the need for knowledgeable face to face human service program services for Beaverhead County residents, and yet comes at a significantly reduced cost from a full time public assistance office. This is an excellent example of finding new ways to provide needed services in an ever challenging and often shrinking budget. It remains difficult to explain to Beaverhead County residents they have to make a nearly three hour round trip to access Butte OPA services face to face while the Anaconda OPA office remains open and is less than a 30 minute drive to Butte.

This proposal is the result of community leaders and activists working collaboratively to find alternative answers to age old issues of limited funds and ever growing human services need. We look to your leadership to support this "win-win" proposal that benefits at risk residents in southwest Montana at significantly reduced costs to DPHHS because of this innovative partnering with Beaverhead County.

Sincerely,

Lynn Weltzien, Chairperson  
Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council  
2 S Pacific, #13, Dillon, MT 59725





## Mental Health *Advisory Council*

Date: August 6, 2018

To: Children, Family, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee

Fr: <sup>KBP</sup> Katherine Buckley-Patton, Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council  
(830 E Parkview Ct, Dillon 59725. 406.660.1637. gaelicgrannie@gmail.com)

Re: Reinstatement of OPA eligibility worker services in Dillon one day/week

The citizens of Dillon and Beaverhead County respectfully request the Department of Public Health and Human Services allocate a portion of redistributed state budget revenue (SB9) towards the return of a knowledgeable eligibility worker to Dillon on a weekly basis. We ask to establish a unique partnership where Beaverhead County will provide office space, internet access, and phone service in a Dillon office, **at no charge to DPHHS**, in exchange for a state eligibility worker meeting face to face with city of Dillon and county residents.

This proposal is a creative partnership developed to address the needs of Beaverhead County residents who suffered devastating losses of public health, mental health, and human services in early January 2018 with the closures of the following offices:

- Beaverhead Office of Public Assistance;
- Western Montana Mental Health Center and Day Treatment;
- Southwest Montana Chemical Dependency Office; and
- Dillon Job Service.

While some Beaverhead County residents are able to navigate the DPHHS online application process or the toll-free help line; these resources are not particularly user friendly, effective, or timely for others, particularly the aged, disabled, or those with mental health challenges. Beaverhead County residents are not signing up for services for which they're eligible because of inherent challenges in the online application or telephone help line, OR because they don't understand how/when to renew eligibility for programs they were once enrolled in. Subsequently, a number of area residents have either lost eligibility or never figured out the initial process on how to become eligible for SNAP, Medicaid, Healthy Montana Kids or Kids Plus, TANF, etc.

This proposed partnership addresses the inherent challenges in Dillon or Lima residents having to drive two to four hours (round trip) to access face to face services at the Butte Office of Public Assistance. The Anaconda OPA office remains open despite the fact it is less than a 30 minute drive from Anaconda to the Butte OPA. A significant number of Deer Lodge County residents frequently travel to Butte for grocery shopping, entertainment, medical care, etc. That same frequency of travel or ease of transportation to the Butte OPA clearly **does not** apply for Beaverhead County residents.

We are realistic and understand a full time OPA office in Dillon likely won't return. Instead we offer a creative partnership to meet Beaverhead County residents' needs, provide critical human service programs' expertise, and yet at significantly reduced costs for the Human and Community Services Division and DPHHS. We strongly encourage you to review and endorse this creative partnership between Beaverhead County and DPHHS and ask for these weekly services to begin immediately.





## Beaverhead County Commissioners

2 South Pacific St., Ste. #4

Dillon, MT 59725-4000

Phone: (406)683-3750 Fax: (406)683-3772

[trice@beaverheadcounty.org](mailto:trice@beaverheadcounty.org)

[mmcganley@beaverheadcounty.org](mailto:mmcganley@beaverheadcounty.org)

[jjackson@beaverheadcounty.org](mailto:jjackson@beaverheadcounty.org)

June 18, 2018

Sheila Hogan, Director  
Department of Public Health and Human Services  
P O Box 202951  
Helena, MT 59620-2951

Dear Sheila,

We, the Beaverhead County Commissioners, request the **immediate** return of a knowledgeable public assistance eligibility worker to hold a full day's office hours in Dillon on a regular, weekly basis to allow area residents access to face to face assistance. This 10 hour shift (travel between Butte and Dillon – one hour each way) is needed to assure a full eight hours of public access. Favorable state revenue estimates is another factor supporting our request.

It is nearly six months since the Public Assistance Office closed and multiple county residents are frustrated, angry, confused, and at a loss of what to do when needing public assistance, especially health coverage.

The county OPA closure immediately caused a significant, negative impact on our community and county wide residents. Local residents banded together to assist our most vulnerable citizens in navigating the 'system' in the alternate ways offered by DPHHS: [apply.mt.gov](http://apply.mt.gov) and a toll free 'help' line. But these "replacement services" **do not** effectively or satisfactorily meet all clients' needs.

Area residents cited the loss of the Beaverhead OPA as their top area of concern in a community wide survey conducted by the Beaverhead County Mental Health Local Advisory Council. The survey confirmed multiple instances where residents, or those assisting them, struggled repeatedly and frequently failed using the online application or toll free "help line." Despite a groundswell of area volunteerism in the past six months, the needs of these folks has overwhelmed our local community resources, their families, and friends.

These services are too important to leave to chance and must be provided equitably! Our residents experience a significant disadvantage attempting to access services face to face. Those with mental health related disabilities are particularly impacted, along with those aged or disabled who don't have the resources or ability to make a minimum 130 mile round trip to Butte.

The "gaps in services" are rapidly multiplying as more individuals become disenfranchised from available and needed services. It is critical for area residents to have face to face access to a knowledgeable eligibility worker so questions are reliably answered, their cases remain open, new

knowledgeable eligibility worker so questions are reliably answered, their cases remain open, new applicants understand program guidelines, appropriate referrals are made, and clear explanations are given about these multiple, complex, and often confusing programs.

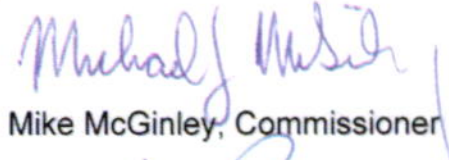
We understand challenges associated with state budget cuts. Beaverhead County offers to partner with DPHHS for the coming year by providing office space for the eligibility worker. This 'no cost' office offer is good through June 30, 2019/SFY20 end. We are open to discussion and negotiation for SFY21.

**"The mission of DPHHS is to improve and protect the health, well-being, and self-reliance of all Montanans."** Those are DPHHS' published goals and objectives. Our residents need the resumption of face to face OPA services in Dillon to improve and protect their health and well being. We take you at your word.

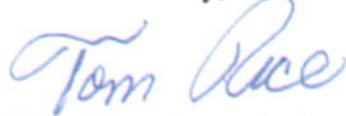
Sincerely,

Handwritten signature of John H. Jackson in black ink.

John Jackson, Chair

Handwritten signature of Mike McGinley in purple ink.

Mike McGinley, Commissioner

Handwritten signature of Tom Rice in blue ink.

Tom Rice, Commissioner

cc: Senator Jeff Welborn, SD36  
Representative Tom Welch, HD32  
Jon Ebelt, DPHHS Communication Director  
Lynn Weltzien, Beaverhead LAC Chair





# Department of Public Health and Human Services

Director's Office ♦ PO Box 4210 ♦ Helena, MT 59620 ♦ (406) 444-5622 ♦ Fax: (406) 444-1970 ♦ www.dphhs.mt.gov

Steve Bullock, Governor

Sheila Hogan, Director

July 2, 2018

Beaverhead County Commissioners  
2 South Pacific St, Suite #4  
Dillon, MT 59725-4000

Re: OPA services in Dillon

**RECEIVED**

JUL 09 2018

BEAVERHEAD COUNTY  
COMMISSIONERS

Dear Commissioners:

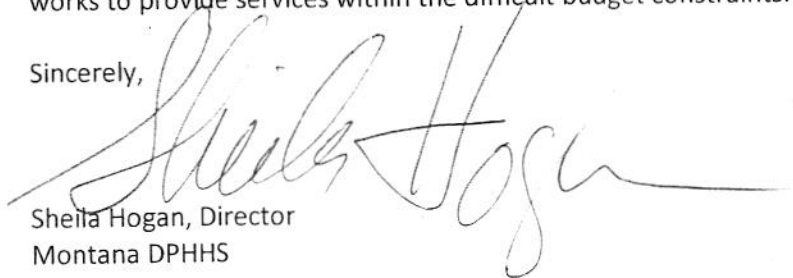
I'm writing in response to the letter I received regarding Office of Public Assistance (OPA) Services in Beaverhead County. We understand the challenges that many face in Dillon, and across the state when it comes to accessing services through our Offices of Public Assistance. As you know, the State has been challenged with budget cuts, and DPHHS has had to implement many reductions, including closures of Offices of Public Assistance. While there is talk of an increase in state revenues, the Executive Branch awaits more details beyond the estimations.

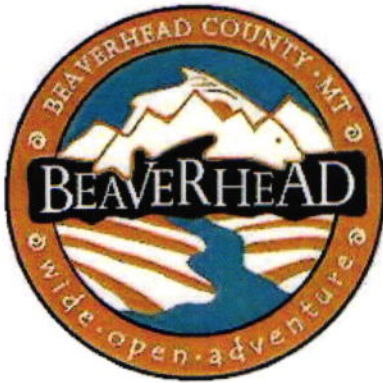
Your letter requests presence of an eligibility worker in Dillon one day a week ongoing. I appreciate the offer of space for a year and I regret to inform you that the Department does not have the capacity to commit at this time. The Offices of Public Assistance have 29 FTE engaged in new hire training and have over 50 vacant field positions. The impacts of the budget reductions are felt at every level of the agency. We are consistently monitoring our budget and ability to hire staff. Additionally, we are in the process of hiring a new Field Operations Manager for the Butte/Silverbow region. Once that position is hired, he/she can review this request and assess capability of hoteling in Dillon on a regular basis.

The Department understands the frustration felt by many Montanans with the Public Assistance Helpline and online application. We are in the process of transitioning to a new phone system and process. This is expected to be implemented in the fall with stronger capability to schedule appointments. We understand the challenges are many, and we continue to work tirelessly to offer the best service possible under the budget conditions.

The OPA closures are significant and felt across the state, I appreciate your advocacy for the residents of Beaverhead County. Thank you for your continued communication and support as the Department works to provide services within the difficult budget constraints.

Sincerely,

  
Sheila Hogan, Director  
Montana DPHHS



## Beaverhead County Commissioners

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[jjackson@beaverheadcounty.org](mailto:jjackson@beaverheadcounty.org)

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### Children, Families, Health, and Human Services Interim Committee 65<sup>th</sup> Montana Legislature

#### SENATE MEMBERS

Mary Caferro  
Frederick (Eric) Moore  
Albert Olszewski  
Diane Sands

#### HOUSE MEMBERS

Kathy Kelker  
Jon Knokey  
Dennis Lenz  
Gordon Pierson

#### COMMITTEE STAFF

Sue O'Connell, Lead  
Alexis Sandru, Attorney  
Fong Hom, Secretary

#### MADAME CHAIRMAN

#### SENATE MEMBERS

HOUSE MEMBERS and  
COMMITTEE STAFF

### INTRODUCTION

- Tom Rice – Beaverhead County Commissioner
- Appointed July 2005
- Member of the Mental Health LAC

We, like other rural areas of Montana, are attempting to deal with the challenges that come with accessing services through the Montana Offices of Public Assistance (DPHHS). The closure of Beaverhead County's OPA quickly caused a negative impact on our citizens' county wide.

Beaverhead County and local residents joined together to address this issue. Beaverhead County has offered to partner with DPHHS for the coming year by providing office space (+/- 1000 square feet) for the eligibility worker. This "no cost" office space offer still "stands approved" through June 30 2019 / SFY 20 end. We are open to discussion and negotiation for SFY 21.

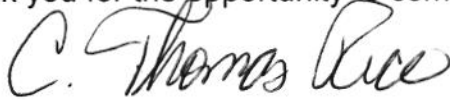
Our Local Advisory Committee, along with many local volunteers, has set up the office including newly painted walls.

We, the Beaverhead County Commissioners, are asking for the Interim and DPHHS to assign a portion of the recent additional revenue to fund a trained Public Assistance Eligibility worker to Dillon. This worker should be able to complete a full day's office hours in Dillon on a regular weekly basis allowing our

residents "face to face" assistance. The 10 (ten) hour shift would include traveling from Butte to Dillon and return (1 hour travel each way).

➤ Open for Questions from Committee

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "C. Thomas Rice". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized "C" and "R".

C. Thomas Rice  
Beaverhead County Commissioner

8/6/18